

THE  
**Cruel Murtherer,**  
OR THE  
**Treacherous Neighbour;**  
BEING

**A True and full Relation of the horrid Mur-**  
**ther of Alice Stephens, and Martha her Daughter ; with**  
**the manner of Burning their Bodies, by Firing the House wherein they**  
**were Murthered ; Committed by Thomas Reignolds of Aldon, in the Parish**  
**of Stoksay in the County of Salop, the 23. of January, 1672.**

Together with his

**TRYAL and EXECUTION.**

---

*Psal. 9. 16. The wicked is snared in the works of his own hands.*

*Prov. 14. 27. The fear of the Lord, is a Fountain of Life, to depart from the  
Snares of Death.*

---

---

**L O N D O N,**

Printed for *Edward Robinson*, Book-seller in *Ludlow*. 1673.

## A True and full Relation of the horrid Murther of *Alice Stephen*, and *Martha* her Daughter, &c.

**N**O Man can possibly be so great a Stranger to his own course and conversation of Life, as not to discover the spreading growth of sin; by our own woful experience we find it to be too true, that when with delight and complacency we inure our selves to the practice of lighter sins for quality and degree, at last growing impudently confident, we fear not to comply with the Devils Temptations to Sins of a deeper die, especially when occasion and opportunity presents us with a fair invitation thereunto; for custom in sin (by the just Judgement of God) unhappily deprives the Sinner of all sense of, and remorse for Sin; upon this stupidity and senselessness of Conscience, there unavoidably follows a ready yeilding to any wicked actions, that are but probably and temptingly propounded.

Commonly the beginnings of sin are bashful and modest, the Devil is so politick in his contrivances to compass our eternal ruine that he modestly lays his foundation with temptations to sins (that in the eye of carnal reason) seem little and inconsiderable; if he chance to find us so facile as readily to comply with those; then like a confident Beggar he importunately solicites our consent to greater sins; nay, such is the unluckly consequence and unavoidable danger of sin, that it frequently falls out, that the courteous Sinner to secure himself from the shame that attends some little sins, thinks himself necessitated to conceal their guilt by the commission of greater ones.

He therefore that sincerely desires to secure his soul from the mortal wounds of grosser sins, must be sure at first not to disregard lesser scares, for a modest and private way of sinning, will at last conclude in a publick and shameless committing of sin.

Our Allwise God hath thought good by the least, to hedge in and secure obedience to the greater Commandments, he therefore that dares frequently attempt to encroach upon this enclosure, and securely violate the lesser circumstance, will at last grow impudently bold, and daringly invade Gods Pre-rogative, in commanding us in matters of greater moment; he that neglects to pay tithes of mint and cumming, will quickly let go the weightier things of the Law; a Lascivious glance of the Eye at first ushered in lustful thoughts  
into

into *David's* heart, this fire quickly broak out into Adultery, and in the end to conceal the shame thereof, 'twas concluded with the Murder of innocent *Uriah*. The best way therefore to secure our selves from the Devils dangerous temptations, is courageously to reject his allurements to little sins, and then he will utterly despair of prevailing with us in grosser impieties.

Possibly we may foolishly propose to our selves certain bounds and limits in our proceedings in the way of sin, but when once we have forfeited the Divine Protection and Assistance, by our frequent deviations, it too often falls out that men violently rush upon destruction, never considering whether their Souls are posting, till they find themselves amidst the infernal Regions of Darkness, a clear demonstration of this truth, you have here presented to your serious consideration in the following lamentable passages.

This *Thomas Reignolds* (as it appears by his own Confession, and the report of his Neighbours) was from his very infancy much addicted to several vices; his Parents (though poor) yet kept him at School so long, till he was able in a competent manner to read in the Bible, but by his own carelessness, and his Parents forgetfulness of their duty to call upon him to read, when he was apprehended and cast into a Prison, he could hardly read at all, for a week or fortnight at least he denied that he could ever read, but at last being discovered to be a Liar herein. by the Minister of the Parish where he lived, he was desired by him to read the 51. *Psalm*, which he did so piteously, that he seldom pronounced a whole word true, being sharply reprov'd for this great loss, which would have been very advantageous to him in order to his preparations for death, which was then posting upon him, he began with a sigh or two to confess how careless he had been in serving God, both in publick in the Church, and in private in his Closet duties; he spent very many Sabbaths in idleness, in sporting and playing, and several in the Ale-house; particularly in the House of *Thomas Corfield*, who lived near unto the House of *John Stephens*, where he committed the following Murthers. Last Summer Assizes he was Arraigned at *Salop*, for stealing six pounds out of the House of *Edward Maddox*, and though with dreadful imprecations he continued to deny that he had the Money, yet upon his Tryal there was so good evidence (upon several very probable circumstances) brought in against him, that he was in great danger of being found guilty, his best friend to save his life, was *John Stephens*, whom he now well requited, by murdering his Wife and Daughter: he was not twenty years of Age, when he acted these following villanies:

On *Wednesday* being the 22. of *January* last past, the day before *Thomas Reignolds* committed the following murthers, he was not then to be found, that night he lay at *Corfields* house, and the Mother and Sister of the said *Thomas Reignolds* coming late there to look for him, *Corfield* and his Wife return'd



them this answer, that he had not been in their House of three months before; this *Corfield* did (as *Reignolds* saith) without his knowledge or consent. The next morning intending to return to his Fathers House; as he went homewards very early, he called at the house of *John Stephens*, to inquire for a pair of Gloves, which he supposed he might leave there the evening before; not finding them there, *John Stephens* being to go to *Stoke Castle*, to his accustomed day's labour, *Thomas Reignolds* accompanied him part of the way towards *Alden*. Not far from the house of *John Stephens* there is a Broomy Close, where *Reignolds* left him, telling *John Stephens* that he would go and search there for his Gloves, for he did not know (as he said) but he might have dropt them there the day before; no sooner had he parted with *John Stephens*, and had entered into the Close, but as he was hanging down his head, and diligently looking for his Gloves, two men (one in Black and the other in light Gray Cloaths) appeared to him, asking him what he sought for, he said for a pair of Gloves which he had lost; they bid him not trouble himself about his Gloves, for if he would be ruled by them, and do as they would have him, he should not want Gloves or any thing else; he asked their names, which they gave to him; he in black called himself *William Pugh*, and the other *Richard Tallet*; these two persons appeared in so good Habit, that he talked with them (as he saith) with his Hat in his hand, and when once he had entered into discourse with them, he had no power to leave their company, when therefore he had promised them obedience upon the forementioned conditions, they turned about and enquired the names of several Neighbouring Towns, as *Ludlow*, *Onibury*, *Staunton*, and *Bromfield*; not long after (as he saith) they proposed to him the following murther, and being asked by the Minister (to whom he first made this confession) what induced him to embrace their motion to so barbarous an action, he said, that he thought *John Stephens* who had sold a Cow about three Weeks before, had received the money for her, without delay therefore or any further scruple, *Thomas Reignolds* followed these two men up to the House of *John Stephens*, he as was said before, was gone to work to the House of the Right Worshipful Sir *Samuel Baldwyn*; *Thomas Reignolds* therefore with the two men after him, entering into the House, he found *Alice Stephens* Spinning at the Wheel, near unto the fire, she being very heavy of hearing, he insensibly came behind her, and laying hold of her under her Chin, he drew back her head with the one hand, and with the other he so suddenly cut her throat, that she had not time so much as to say, Lord have Mercy upon her soul, no sooner had he thus imbrued his hands in this innocent blood, but he looked behind him, but could not (as he confessed) see the two Men.

As yet his conscience was not awakened, neither was he in the least troubled for what he had done, or terrified with beholding this poor creature lying in her own Blood. Leaving therefore her dead body, he began to search the house for the reward which the Devil (or his own wicked thoughts) proposed to him for this horrible Murder, but finding no Money (for as it hapned it was not then received) he met with nothing that he could conveniently carry away, save only her wedding Rings, as he was above in the Chamber busily searching about, he espied *Martha* the Daughter of *Alice Stephens* coming homewards, (for she happened to be out of doors when her Mother was murdered) the better therefore to secure himself by concealing this first murder, to add Blood to Blood; in pursuance of this his cursed resolution, he instantly left the Chamber, and posted towards the door of the house, and no sooner was this young girl entred in, but he laid Violent hands on her, and being much too strong for her (she was about 14. or 16. Years of age) he so suddenly cut her throat also, that she had time to say no more, but where's my Mother.

When he had thus inhumanely butchered these two innocent souls, he not long after, returned back again to the house of *Thomas Corfield*, and continued drinking there the greatest part of that day.

This double Murder was committed between Nine & Eleven of the Clock on Thursday the 23d. day of *January*, in the beginning of the night he left *Corfield's* house, and went back towards the house of *John Stephens*, and entering thereinto, he dragged *Martha Stephens* from the door (where he left her, after he had Murdered her,) into a Hovel joyning to the house, then taking some Fire from the Hearth, he conveyed it into some Straw that was in the Hovel, and thereby he burnt the house, and with it consumed to Ashes the greatest part of both their Bodies.

Thus having by murder and fire most inhumanely deprived this poor man (not only of the best part of his worldly comforts, but also of the greatest part of his goods, which by his hard labour he had gathered together, *Thomas Reynolds* takes sanctuary again at *Corfield's* house, and (as it appears by his confession) he continued drinking there till *Richard Corfield* returned from the fire, and then being spoken to by him to go home, he immediately departed towards *Aldon*; and finding his Father and Mother with the rest of that poor family gone to their rest, and the doors of the house shut, he conveyed himself in through a wall that was broken down on the back-side of the house, and laying himself down upon his bed, he thought to take some rest, but the inward gripes and pangs of his guilty conscience, did so intolerably torture and torment him, that he could not lay his eye-lids together.

Seeing therefore he could find no rest within doors, he rose up again, and  
went



went out of the house, instantly the two men (as he confidently saith) appeared to him again, the first question that they asked him, was, whether he had any Enemies in the Town, whereunto he return'd this answer, that he had two, naming *Edward Maddox*, who (as was said before) indicted him the last Summer *Affizes* for stealing six Pounds out of his house; and *Richard White* (both of *Aldon*) who went to the Justice for a Warrant to apprehend him. They aske him, if he would not be revenged on them, whereunto he reply'd, how should he be reveng'd on them, they tell him, by consuming all that they had.

Upon this suggestion his devilish malice instantly complied with that revengful motion, wherefore being resolutely bent to follow their hellish directions, he went back into his Fathers house, and took out thence (as he confesses, unknown to any of the Family) a large stick of fire; with it in his hand he posted to the house of *Edward Maddox* of *Aldon*, intending first to fire his house, but perceiving the wind to blow the fire towards his Fathers house, for fear lest that also should be burnt with it, he desisted from his purpose there, and went immediately to the house of *Richard White* of the same Village, and about Mid-night he put the fire into some Broom wherewith his Oven was covered to keep it dry, and never left blowing it, till it began to flame when he had done this work of the Devil, he went into a close at the end of the Town, to see the issue thereof; and (as he saith) he walked several times about it, being willing to return to the house, and quench the fire, before it broke out into a violent flame, but he could not (as he confesses) find the way out, he was so terrified and amazed. Had not therefore the fears that seized upon *Richard White* and his Wife, in beholding *Stephens* house on fire, with the strong jealousies that his Wife and Daughter were murdered before the house was burnt, they also with three small Children had been consumed to Ashes, with their Dwelling House, out Houses, Grain, Hay, Impliments of Husbandry, and Household-stuff, with this house the next house was fired and burnt to the ground, and the rest of the Town was in very great danger. All this time whilst these two houses were Burning, this barbarous Villian stood upon the edge of the Common (called *Aldons Mind*) where he did the Murder and fired the first house.

Now all persons began to suspect *Thomas Reignolds*, he fearing therefore lest he should be taken upon suspicion, resolves not to enter the Town again, but instantly to betake himself to the woods, and as he was flying his two old companions appeared to him again, no sooner did he see them, but he began to discover his fears and jealousies to them, they encouraged him with fair promises that he should not be taken, and (as he saith) they went with him to a Hay barn belonging to *Mr. Rowland Baugh* of the Stone House, and there

there they continued talking with him, till he was fast a sleep, the next morning when he did awake, his guilty Conscience (as he confesses) did so terrify and torment him, with the lamentable cries of that Innocent Blood he had so barbarously spilt, that he found as little ease as if he had been laid upon a Bed of Thorns. Under these horrors, and terrors, he past away the day; on Friday night, those two men appeared to him again, telling him that he was very secure there, and so perswaded him to alter his resolution of flying that night, he being very drowsy quickly fell a sleep; waking again the next Morning, though he mis'd his companions, yet he found his old terrours were mightily increased; and he was beyond expression affrighted with the horrid representations of the grave and hell, whether he feared his Soul and Body were positing. In this miserable condition he continued all Saturday, at night his miserable comforters visited him again: the first question that now they proposed to him, was whether he were not hungry, he said, yes I am very hungry, and more thirsty (and well indeed he might for from Thursday to Saturday night, he had not tasted a bit of Bread; or drunk so much as a drop of of Water) they tell him that if he would follow them, they would bring him where he should have both Meat and Drink. It is not to be doubted but that he chearfully embraced their Motion. Instantly therefore they went with him to the house of *Richard Jennings* of the Parish of *Onibury*, which *Thomas Reignolds* confesses he broke open, thereupon they entred with him into it, where he drank *Metheglin*, and took from thence a *Cheese* and a *Loaf* of Bread, which were taken with him next day. (He was asked whether these two men did Eat and Drink with him, he said no, they only stood by him) when therefore by this means he had allaid the violence of his hunger and thirst, these two men returned with him to the Hay-Barn again, still encouraging him not to fly, but however his intentions were about Cocks-Crowing (when he had taken a little rest) to forsake the Barn, and fly for his life, but when he was once fallen asleep, he did not awake till Sunday-morning when he was apprehended.

On *Tuesday* the 11th. of *March*, he received his Tryal, he pleaded guilty: and on the *Thursday* following the Sentence was passed upon him; he was adjudged to be Hang'd in Chains on *Aldons Mind*, near the place where he did the murder. Accordingly on *Thursday March* the 20th. he was Executed.

He expressed much sorrow for what he had done, and was troubled at nothing so much as the Murther of the Girle; he wept much on *Wensday*, the day before he received the Sentence, and no sooner did he see *John Stephens*, but he fell upon his knees, desiring him with much earnestness to forgive him.

What truth may be in the circumstances of this Confession, 'tis not easie to determine, to some I know these apparitions will seem incredible, I shall only  
mind



more such that it is very improbable, that a Condemn'd person should thus assemble with God and the world, that the Dead hath appeared several times in a bodily shape, is a truth denied by very few ~~but~~ Atheists; he that believes the Scripture cannot question the possibility herein; to me *Saul* and the Witch of *Endor* puts the question out of all controversy; that it was not *Samuel*, but the Devil personating him; several of the Ancient Fathers were of opinion, as *Tertullian*, *Justin*, *Martyr*, *St. Austin*, and *St. Jerome*, with others, as they are cited by *Dr. Rainolds* in his 88. and 89. *Proleptions de lib. Apocryphis*, And indeed it is not probable, that seeing the Lord would not answer *Saul* by Dreams, nor by Urim, nor by Prophets, 1 Sam. 28. 6. Yea, seeing *Samuel* would not see *Saul* before his Death, 1 Sam. 35. 35. It seems also rather improbable that he should appear to him now he was dead, especially to encourage that unlawful way of consulting the Dead by a Witch, which was so severely prohibited in the Word of God; there are several other reasons urged in the foregoing *Proleptions*, and all Arguments to the contrary (seem to me) fully answered; though therefore I have not so much credit for this Villain as to make these Apparitions Articles of my Faith upon his bare Confession, yet the probability of the thing, makes me the more confidently to ascertain it; but the Reader herein is left to his own liberty; and if he doth indifferently weigh all circumstances, he will find it not so improbable as it is commonly thought, then reject it as an impossible thing.

To conclude, this strange and unparalleled Murther, with the following firing of the two Houses, I have thought good to publish to the World, that all (but especially young) men, may take warning thereby, and be perswaded to break of all their sinful courses, particularly these sins of Drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, Cursing, Swearing, Lying and Stealing, these were the Sins that made way for these almost incredible Villanies; if this faithful Relation doth happily procure these effects in any that reads or hears it, I have attained my end and an ample reward of my small pains; and you thereby instead of bequeathing Shame to your selves and your Relations, will find much comfort and contentment on Earth, and everlasting joy in Heaven.



